

Source Reference
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EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 10501

NOVEMBER 5, 1953

SAFEGUARDING OFFICIAL INFORMATION IN THE INTERESTS OF THE DEFENSE OF THE UNITED STATES

WHEREAS it is essential that the citizens of the United States be informed concerning the activities of their government; and

WHEREAS the interests of national defense require the preservation of the ability of the United States to protect and defend itself against all hostile or destructive action by covert or overt means, including espionage as well as military action; and

WHEREAS it is essential that certain official information affecting the national defense be protected uniformly against unauthorized disclosure:

NOW, THEREFORE, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and statutes, and as President of the United States, and deeming such action necessary in the best interests of the national security, it is hereby ordered as follows:

Section 1. CLASSIFICATION CATEGORIES

Official information which requires protection in the interests of national defense shall be limited to three categories of classification, which in descending order of importance shall carry one of the following designations: Top Secret, Secret, or Confidential. No other designation shall be used to classify defense information, including military information, as requiring protection in the interests of national defense, except as expressly provided by statute. These categories are defined as follows:

(a) Top Secret: Except as may be expressly provided by statute, the use of the classification Top Secret shall be authorized, by appropriate authority, only for defense information or material which requires the highest degree of protection. The Top Secret classification shall be applied only to that information or material the defense aspect of which is paramount, and the unauthorized disclosure of which could result in exceptionally grave damage to the Nation, such as leading to a definite break in diplomatic relations affecting the defense of the United States, an armed attack against the United States or its allies, a war, or the compromise of military or defense plans, or intelligence operations, or scientific or technological developments vital to the national defense.

(b) Secret: Except as may be expressly provided by statute, the use of the classification Secret shall be authorized, by appropriate authority, only for defense information or material the unauthorized disclosure of which could result in serious damage to the Nation, such as by jeopardizing the international relations of the United States, endangering the effectiveness of a program or policy of vital importance to the national defense, or compromising important military or defense plans, scientific or technological developments important to national defense, or information revealing important intelligence operations.

(c) Confidential: Except as may be expressly provided by statute, the use of the classification Confidential shall be authorized, by appropriate authority, only for defense information or material the unauthorized disclosure of which could be prejudicial to the defense interests of the nation.

Documentary record material made or received by a department or agency in connection with the transaction of public business and preserved as evidence of the organization, functions, policies, operations, decisions, procedures or other activities of any department or agency of the Government, or because of the informational value of the data contained therein, may be destroyed only in accordance with the act of July 7, 1943, ch. 92, 57 Stat. 380, as amended, 44 U.S.C. 366-380. Non-record classified material, consisting of extra copies and duplicates including shorthand notes, preliminary drafts, used carbon paper, and other material of similar temporary nature, may be destroyed, under procedures established by the head of the department or agency which meet the following requirements, as soon as it has served its purpose:

(a) Methods of Destruction: Classified defense material shall be destroyed by burning in the presence of an appropriate official or by other methods authorized by the head of an agency provided the resulting destruction is equally complete.

(b) Records of Destruction: Appropriate accountability records maintained in the department or agency shall reflect the destruction of classified defense material.

Section 10. ORIENTATION AND INSPECTION

To promote the basic purposes of this order, heads of those departments and agencies originating or handling classified defense information shall designate experienced persons to coordinate and supervise the activities applicable to their departments or agencies under this order. Persons so designated shall maintain active training and orientation programs for employees concerned with classified defense information to impress each such employee with his individual responsibility for exercising vigilance and care in complying with the provisions of this order. Such persons shall be authorized on behalf of the heads of the departments and agencies to establish adequate and active inspection programs to the end that the provisions of this order are administered effectively.

Section 11. INTERPRETATION OF REGULATIONS BY THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

The Attorney General, upon request of the head of a department or agency or his duly designated representative, shall personally or through authorized representatives of the Department of Justice render an interpretation of these regulations in connection with any problems arising out of their administration.

Section 12. STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Nothing in this order shall be construed to authorize the dissemination, handling or transmission of classified information contrary to the provisions of any statute.

Section 13. "RESTRICTED DATA" AS DEFINED IN THE ATOMIC ENERGY ACT

Nothing in this order shall supersede any requirements made by or under the Atomic Energy Act of August 1, 1946, as amended. "Restricted Data" as defined by the said act shall be handled, protected, classified, downgraded, and declassified in conformity with the provisions of the Atomic Energy Act of 1946, as amended, and the regulations of the Atomic Energy Commission.

Section 14. COMBAT OPERATIONS

The provisions of this order with regard to dissemination, transmission, or safekeeping of classified defense information or material may be so modified in

connection with combat or combat-related operations as the Secretary of Defense may by regulations prescribe.

Section 15. EXCEPTIONAL CASES

When, in an exceptional case, a person or agency not authorized to classify defense information originates information which is believed to require classification, such person or agency shall protect that information in the manner prescribed by this order for that category of classified defense information into which it is believed to fall, and shall transmit the information forthwith, under appropriate safeguards, to the department, agency, or person having both the authority to classify information and a direct official interest in the information (preferably, that department, agency, or person to which the information would be transmitted in the ordinary course of business), with a request that such department, agency, or person classify the information.

Section 16. REVIEW TO INSURE THAT INFORMATION IS NOT IMPROPERLY WITHHELD HEREUNDER

The President shall designate a member of his staff who shall receive, consider, and take action upon, suggestions or complaints from non-Governmental sources relating to the operation of this order.

Section 17. REVIEW TO INSURE SAFEGUARDING OF CLASSIFIED DEFENSE INFORMATION

The National Security Council shall conduct a continuing review of the implementation of this order to insure that classified defense information is properly safeguarded, in conformity herewith.

Section 18. REVIEW WITHIN DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES

The head of each department and agency shall designate a member or members of his staff who shall conduct a continuing review of the implementation of this order within the department or agency concerned to insure that no information is withheld hereunder which the people of the United States have a right to know, and to insure that classified defense information is properly safeguarded in conformity herewith.

Section 19. REVOCATION OF EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 10290

Executive Order No. 10290 of September 24, 1951 is revoked as of the effective date of this order.

Section 20. EFFECTIVE DATE

This order shall become effective on December 15, 1953.

DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER

THE WHITE HOUSE,

November 5, 1953.